Professional Responsibility and Leadership
C40.0012.10

Syllabus – Fall 2008

Professor: Rex W. Mixon, Jr.  Class Hours: Thursdays 9:30 – 10:45
Email: rmixon@stern.nyu.edu  Class Room: KMC 3 – 130
Tel: (212) 998-0061  Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30 – 2:00 and
Office: KMC 10-88  Thursdays by appointment

Course Description

This course asks the student to reflect on several themes:

(i) the role of business in society, on a local, national, and global basis;

(ii) economic and ethical aspects of acting as a business professional and the responsibilities that these imply; and

(iii) several models or approaches to ‘leadership’ and their application to business.

Moreover, this course asks the student to see the relationships among these three topics, and the relationships between these topics and a meaningful human life. In other words, this is a short course in making connections.

Course materials will be drawn simultaneously from two sources: Each week students will analyze current cases from business practice, and points or issues in current law, some of which will be short readings provided by the instructor in class on the day. These readings will form the texts of the course. Each week students will also read all or part of a classic work (usually from outside business) that explores the same theme from the standpoint of philosophy, psychology, religion, law, or the arts. These readings will form the subtexts of the course. In discussions and analyses, students and instructors will synthesize the subtexts with the texts to arrive at an integrative point of view.

This is an interdisciplinary capstone course, building on all prior core coursework, both at the Stern School and in the other colleges. The goal of the course is to help the student develop a personal sense of business professionalism and leadership, and of how such a person should behave in ambiguous, uncertain situations, balancing self-interests and those of the firm within the larger context of society, ethics, and law.

Class sessions will include discussion, in-class analyses, student presentations, and one or two guest speakers.
Construction of the Course Grade

Each student is required to keep each week a personal journal containing the student’s analyses, commentaries, and reflections concerning the subject matter examined in the assigned readings and class discussion. Journal entries should evidence the student’s engagement with the material presented in the readings and the ideas discussed each week in class. For each module of the course, the student’s journal and an essay (on a topic to be assigned) are due on Blackboard, with a copy delivered at class, as follows:

- Journal and Essay for Module I  Due October 23, 2008  25% of grade
- Journal and Essay for Module II  Due November 20, 2008  25% of grade
- Journal and Essay for Module III  Due December 11, 2008  25% of grade
- Class preparation and participation  25% of grade

Total  100%

Topics, Texts & Subtexts

I. Markets, Wealth, Rights, and Meaning (5 Sessions) (September 18 – October 16)

What is the role of business in society, on a local, national, and global basis? What role do markets play in securing material wealth and political/ethical well-being? How do market imperfections or market failures (lack of competition, externalizing costs, public goods, asymmetric information) lead to outcomes that can raise ethical issues?

Topics

Commerce and Wealth in the World
Ethics and Market Imperfections
Human Rights versus Rights of Property and Right to Contract
Global Wealth Distribution
Ethics of International Business
Wealth, Property and Meaning in Life
II. Personal and Professional Life (4 sessions) (October 23 – November 13)

What are the economic and ethical aspects of acting as a business professional in the context of the topics discussed in prior class sessions and the responsibilities that these imply? Specifically, what does it mean to be a fiduciary agent of capital in today’s global economy and how does one decide “to whom to be a fiduciary” and “for what to be a fiduciary” in a way that yields both personal and professional fulfillment?

Topics

Professional Duties and Personal Identity
Standards of Truth and Disclosure
Loyalty and Side Deals
Loyalty and Whistleblowing
Industrial Espionage and Trade Secrets
Fiduciary Duties to Investors

Texts

Cases and articles from current business press
“Over the Line: A Staffer Ordered To Commit Fraud Balked, Then Caved --- Pushed by WorldCom Bosses, Accountant Betty Vinson Helped Cook the Books” – Wall Street Journal
Possible Subtexts

Crito - Plato
Gorgias (portions) – Plato
On Duties (portions) – Cicero
Nicomachean Ethics (portions) – Aristotle
Memoirs (portions) – Ulysses S. Grant
The Analects (portions) - Confucius

III. Business, Leadership and Society (3 sessions)  (November 20 – December 11)

How should we think of “business leadership” in the context of the topics discussed in prior class sessions? What are the constraints on leadership imposed by the fiduciary role; that is, how does the business leader faithfully serve the shareholder while not violating personal and community standards of ethics and due process? What are the different styles of leadership and which one is best?

Topics

Power, Leadership and Humanity
Entrepreneurial Leadership
Ethical Leadership
Leadership and the Law
Leadership and Personal Identity

Texts

Cases and articles from current business press
“How (Un) Ethical Are You?” – Harvard Business Review
“Leadership That Gets Results” – Harvard Business Review
Working With Emotional Intelligence – Daniel Goleman

Possible Subtexts

The Path of the Law (portions) – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.
The Prince (portions) - Machiavelli
The Tao-te Ching (portions) – Lao Tzu
Rhetoric (portions) – Aristotle
Henry V (portions) – William Shakespeare
Gettysburg Address – Abraham Lincoln